NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5816 MAY 12, 1978
JOHN ROBERTS/JOHANNESBURG

BISHOP MUZOREWA--IN OR OUT?

ANNCR:

ONCE AGAIN, THERE IS A CRISIS IN RHODESIAN PRIME MINISTER IAN SMITH'S INTERNAL AGREEMENT. BLACK NATIONALIST LEADER BISHOP ABEL MUZOREWA IS THREATENING TO PULL OUT OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OVER THE FIRING OF A BLACK JUSTICE MINISTER, AND A FINAL DECISION BY HIM IS EXPECTED THIS SUNDAY. V.O.A. CORRESPONDENT JOHN ROBERTS HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON THE SITUATION.

VOICE:

BISHOP MUZOREWA SAYS THE FIRING OF MISTER BYRON HOVE WAS IMPROPER BECAUSE HE WAS NOT CONSULTED BY THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, AND HE SAYS HE WILL WITHDRAW FROM THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT UNLESS MISTER HOVE IS RE-INSTATED. MISTER SMITH, REVEREND SITHOLE AND CHIEF CHIRAU HAVE ALL DECLINED TO DO THIS. AND NOW IT'S SQUARELY UP TO THE BISHOP WHETHER HE GOES THROUGH WITH IT OR NOT.

ALTHOUGH IT HAS NEVER BEEN TESTED AT THE POLLS, THERE IS A WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT BISHOP MUZOREWA HAS THE LARGEST FOLLOWING OF ANY OF THE INTERNALLY-BASED BLACK NATIONALISTS. HIS WITHDRAWAL FROM THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE A FATAL BLOW TO MISTER SMITH'S INTERNAL SETTLEMENT -- AN OPINION SHARED BY THE BISHOP HIMSELF.

UNLIKE THE OTHER TWO NATIONALISTS, BISHOP MUZOREWA HAS A LARGE AND POWERFUL POLITICAL PARTY -- THE UNITED AFRICAN NATIONAL COUNCIL -- WHICH HE MUST ANSWER TO. SOURCES IN SALISBURY SAY IT'S WIDELY BELIEVED THAT THE BISHOP IS PERSONALLY RELUCTANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT, BUT THAT HE IS UNDER STRONG PRESSURE TO DO SO FROM HIS AIDES AND SUPPORTERS.

THEY BELIEVE THAT THE FIRING OF MISTER HOVE SHOWS THAT THE INTERNAL SETTLEMENT HAS LEFT THE WHITES FIRMLY IN CONTROL, AND THAT THE ONLY HONORABLE THING FOR THE BISHOP TO DO IS TO PULL OUT.

OBSERVERS ARE PUZZLED BY THE APPARENT WILLINGNESS OF MISTER SMITH AND THE TWO BLACK NATIONALISTS TO PERMIT THE INTERNAL AGREEMENT TO COLLAPSE OVER WHAT MANY REGARD AS A RELATIVELY MINOR ISSUE. BUT REVEREND SITHOLE SAYS, IF MISTER HOVE IS RE-INSTATED, IT WOULD SHOW THAT THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL HAS NO TEETH, AND THAT THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT CAN GET ALONG WITHOUT THE BISHOP AND HIS PARTY.

NOW, THE BISHOP HAS TO DECIDE WHETHER THE PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN THE FIRING OF MISTER HOVE OUTWEIGH THE PROSPECTS OF A COLLAPSED AGREEMENT. THE OTHER THREE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL APPARENTLY ARE GAMBLING HE WILL GIVE IN. WHETHER HE DOES OR NOT, IT WON'T BE AN EASY CHOICE.

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JS/RTD